World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 791 recorded 20 June 2000

GUEST: Angela E.V. King
Special Adviser to the United Nations
Secretary-General on Gender Issues and
Advancement of Women

JOURNALIST: Evelyn Leopold, Reuters
Jack Freeman, The Earth Times

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

RESULTS OF BEIJING +5 WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, succeeded in bringing about a new international commitment to the goal of advancement of women's rights. The Beijing declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by representatives from 189 States, constituted a powerful agenda for women's empowerment. This June, the United Nations General Assembly held a special session called "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century", also known as Beijing +5. The session focussed on examples of good practices, positive actions, lessons learned, and the obstacles and key challenges remaining. In this edition of **World Chronicle**, Angela King, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, talks about Beijing +5 and the struggle for women's rights worldwide.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration: 28:36"
Executive Producer: Chaim Litewski
Director: Ivan Stoynov
Production Assistant: Corazon A. Icasas

ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. Are women making real progress in their lives? Recent data show that they are making gains but persistent disparities between women and men remain. Today, women are having fewer children, enter marriage later in life and the gender gap in education is closing. However, two-thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women. They continue to be under-represented in governments and political parties. And women now account for almost half of all cases of HIV/AIDS. Recently, nearly 10,000 women from more than 180 countries attended a week-long special session of the United Nations General Assembly called "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century". It was also known as Beijing +5, a reference to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in 1995.

Our guest today is an expert on women's issues. She is Angela King, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Joining me to talk with Ms. King are Evelyn Leopold from *Reuters* and Jack Freeman from *The Earth Times*.

Ms. King, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

KING: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. King, we are familiar with those cartoon images of a caveman with a club in one hand dragging a woman by her hair with the other. Sometimes one wonders whether things have changed all that much since prehistoric times, apart from the execution. The affair in Central Park in New York for example when wildings so-called took place and a bunch of thugs attacked women, I mean this reflects the attitude of disrespect which women confront all the time. Now how many conferences is it going to take to change this attitude which is basically the problem?

KING: Well, it probably would take a good number of conferences but in the meantime the real work is done not during the conferences but between. And I think we have seen quite a few attitudes changed, say since the Beijing Conference in 1995, and certainly since the first conference in Mexico in 1975. But stereotypical attitudes towards women's role on the part of both men and women remain still one of the major obstacles.

LITTLEJOHNS: In the UN where women are striving for equality with men in posts, particularly at the professional levels, there seems to be a bit of a male backlash because the feeling is, in some quarters, that women are getting more than equal opportunity, which seems a little strange. But nonetheless it's something which is there. What is your experience with that?

KING: My experience is there is a backlash largely because people don't know what the real statistics are. Women are still only under 40 percent. It's 38.9 percent at the professional level and as you know, D- and above -- only Directors, Assistant Director level and above -- it's only about 29 percent. So it's nowhere near parity or 50 percent. And according to the Administrative Tribunal, according to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, affirmative action is perfectly in order until parity is reached. So the Secretary-General has had carte blanche to pursue these measures. But I think women need to inform men. More men need to be more informed about issues and women also need to take risks more in order to apply for more posts.

LITTLEJOHNS: What do you mean exactly? What risks do they have to take?

KING: Well, women staff do not always wish to say, apply for posts at the same rate as men because women tend, I think, to be more self-deprecating. In other words, they want to be really excellent and be assured that they fit every single aspect of the requirements of the post before they apply. Whereas men are still prepared to take risks that they can do the job even though they may not meet every single qualification.

LITTLEJOHNS: So this theory of pushy women is a lot of nonsense? They're not pushy at all.

KING: I think it is. It is. But at the same time women are prepared to go into the field. That's another myth that women can't go into the field. They are prepared to go into peacekeeping operations and I think we are seeing increasingly more of them in those areas.

LITTLEJOHNS: In peacekeeping?

KING: Yes. Not enough. But you know ....

LEOPOLD: May we return to the Conference that just ended. The document in some areas went further than what delegates negotiated at the landmark Beijing Conference in 1995. Can you name some of them and how are any of these issues to translate into action in individual countries?

KING: Well I would put up at the very top of the list globalization which was only mentioned in a sentence or two in the Beijing Platform of Action. But since that period globalization has mushroomed as a massive global process and there were several references to it, particularly as it affects the impact of globalization on women and issues or steps that countries could take to look into the data and see how their policies could make the process benefit -- women rather than have a negative effect. There's also violations against women. In this area there were a lot of issues of legislation and steps that could be taken such as setting up national agencies or national rapporteurs to look into the data and to feed that into policies more directly than have been done in the past. And also in the area of AIDS, I think that's another mushrooming area. There was much more about information on AIDS and how it affected women.

FREEMAN: A moment ago you spoke of the changes for the better in attitudes in the last 25 years, could you be more specific? What attitudes do you think have changed for the better and what attitudes are going to be changed next?

KING: Well, very few women were at the professional level. Say take for an example, in the United Nations in 1975, they were about 15 or 18 percent at the professional level. Now I think it is much more accepted across all duty stations that women have the right to apply for posts in whatever occupational level. In Political Affairs, it's quite a large number of women; Peacekeeping, not as large but there are; Public Information, and so on. There are also attitudes that have translated themselves to the national levels such as legislation. There are more women in parliament perhaps certainly than in Mexico, maybe not since Beijing, but that's another area. And governments are really actively taking steps to try and educate people, build capacity, putting in quota legislation, proportional representation to bring that about.

FREEMAN: In other words what do you expect to happen in the immediate future?

KING: Well, there are still attitudes in some countries that would imply that women should stay in the home. If she does not stay at the home the family values will erode, the children will not be brought up properly, and so on. I think a lot has to be done in that area still. And of course there's the whole question of poverty which keeps women down. And attitudes remain rather stereotypical when women can't really go out there and take their place in society.

LITTLEJOHNS: What kind of pressure can be put on countries that still persist in

this antiquated attitude?

KING: I think one of the ways is where you have countries that are States Parties to international covenants and they have to report on a four-yearly basis, for example, such as with the Convention on the Elimination, commonly called the Women's Bill of Rights. States Parties have to report every four years. The Committee reviews this. They're doing it now currently by the way. We had Cuba yesterday, Cameroon today, Iraq a few days ago and the Committee Members who are experts in their own rights say you have done this very well, you've had this legislation but in other areas what are you doing about primary school education targets, what are you doing about nationality law, and so on. And in this way countries are sensitized. It goes into the public view which countries do that is very useful and you know can be adapted in other countries such as setting up battered centres or hotline. The Canadians have done that and others have copied. And at the same time, there's also censure in the case of some countries that use abortion for example as a method for family planning. That is often cited as a case which should not be.

LEOPOLD: How important are the women's groups that came here from all over the world? The UN has more or less in the last five years provided a space for them at this and other conferences. In many of these countries you don't really have a lot of civil liberties and they're also the same countries that have protested very strongly against many things at the last conference and that was mainly – several of them from the Middle East who defended both religious and political rights that the government felt were part of themselves. How do you think the world will proceed on this? I mean is this pressure going to build, is the Internet going to help because I noticed at this last conference that quite often the delegations here were more progressive than the governments they represented or the parliaments they have to deal with?

KING: And sometimes it was vice versa.

LEOPOLD: Yes.

KING: Because I think sometimes the people from the capital actually knew the subject more, in greater depths, and they knew the practical applications – how far it was possible to apply it in a practical way at the national level. But to come back to the first part of your question about women's groups I think they made a tremendous, very positive effect on the Special Session and its outcome not just during the period of the Special Session but on the whole lead-up which lasted at least two years. There were regional conferences, there

were many seminars around the themes of the twelve critical areas of the platform and it was a lot of lobbying and pressuring by these groups from the grassroots right on up. I think since Beijing also there has been a much stronger recognition that women have to get involved with the Internet and with the latest forms of communication and in fact there were online conferences and chat rooms on all these themes that went on prior to the conference and over the last six months or so.

LEOPOLD: I am thinking of the African groups which were quite militant here, both government and grassroots groups. With AIDS such a big issue there how do you think they would view this? I mean it seemed some of them may have been saying, "We don't really care about all your little fine points about the family, we need sex education now and we don't care. We'll give permission". I'm not sure I've been interpreting them correctly. You were closer to...

KING: I think some would definitely say that and there are some groups that took out of the conference and out of the Special Session outcome document what they wanted to hear and you heard that in the statements at the very end. You know we were disappointed in this and we were happy in that. We intend to implement but we read into it the right to do so and so. A case in point is the US and the European group very clearly said that they regretted the fact that the words "sexual orientation" were not there. But there was a phrase which they latched on to, "other types of sexual orientation" without using those words which they said they took to mean full sexual rights and sexual orientation. They would read their own interpretation into it. Certainly I think the Africans to whom I spoke afterwards were very pleased about the intense attention in the outcome document to the problems of AIDS, the recognition that it affected older women particularly and women were left with looking after orphans and, for the first time, the whole idea that men were responsible for using safe methods so that they would prevent STDs -- Sexually Transmitted Diseases -- and HIV/AIDS.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Angela King, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.

FREEMAN: Ms. King, a moment ago you spoke of documents. It's been more than 50 years now since the UN Charter spoke of equality of the sexes and the Declaration of Human Rights a few years later said the same thing. And yet it was only a few years ago,

relatively speaking, that your position was created for advancing women within the UN. How many more years, how many more half centuries is it going to take before your Office becomes obsolete?

KING: I hope very soon.

LITTLEJOHNS: You're an optimist, Miss King.

KING: I think it will be a decade or two before because you're dealing with resources. Very often at present, governments, the UN system pus gender at the bottom of the list. When a peacekeeping mission has problems with finance almost the very first thing to go is the gender unit, if it was envisaged. And I am very happy to say that now all peacekeeping partners are putting in gender units -- there's one in East Timor, there's one in Kosovo -- but very little resources. So you have a question of attitude, you have a question of low priority and I think that the links with gender and full participation of women, whether it's development, whether it's peacemaking, are not sufficiently clear. And this is what we hope will have become clearer after people studied this document in depth.

LEOPOLD: The United Nations, not unlike any group, would have a problem with its own employees and it's not unusual for the United Nations. Do you feel that harassment of women by UN officials has improved at all and what about peacekeepers who are not going through the sensitivity training that some of the men working for the UN may be and who... I mean in Cambodia it was a joke on this issue and when women complained of harassment or UN women complained that the peacekeepers were just engendering prostitution all over the place the word from the United Nations Headquarters was "boys will be boys". Do you think this attitude has changed at all?

KING: I think it has changed. I certainly don't think you would ever have that kind of statement from any ....

LEOPOLD: Well, I'm talking ten years here.

KING: I don't think you would have that kind of statement from any UN official today. But Evelyn, surprisingly enough the peacekeepers now, precisely because of that event and some of the related events in other peacekeeping missions -- Mozambique, for example -- they are getting quite a bit of training, perhaps more than the ones in the Headquarters offices. There's a code of conduct. Now, it isn't universal yet, it is not as much as we would like but the UN has been cooperating with UK, the Canadian government, the Lester Pearson Institute and there are training programmes in this area. But on the whole

question of sexual harassment what we have found is not so much that there are many cases but where the cases exist women are very reluctant -- and some men by the way -- are very reluctant to come forward and give the details so that they can be followed up. We're trying to look at the procedures that we currently have. They're certainly due for a good revision and to make them more user friendly so that these cases can be followed up and that there can really be fair and equitable redress in cases. Not just the case where the woman is paid money because she's a nuisance, because she said something, but the man is brought to book.

LITTLEJOHNS: It has happened that women who complained about some sexual harassment that the guy is promoted and the woman is fired or demoted or moved or whatever.

KING: Moved but I don't know what the very recent statistics are. And I think Michael, in all fairness, possibly because the procedures are not as transparent and they're not as close enough to the staff, staff are not really aware of what the redress is. Even some of our officials in Personnel are not really fully aware of what these procedures are. People do not come forward. So to say that it's widespread or to say that it's minuscule I don't think anybody is in a position to say that right now and this is one of the areas that we're really looking at.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is that something that you're addressing in your office?

KING: Well, it is the Office of the Human Resources. Management is responsible for it. We're working very closely with them. During the course of the Special Session there was a panel on sexual harassment that looked at what people were doing in Greece and other countries, the military in this country, and so on, to get ideas of where we should be going from here in the 21st century

LEOPOLD: Of course the cases we have all heard about have always been started by Americans, both the Cambodia situation and some recent ones here. And I just wondered if the women from other countries that are not used to running to the first court and knowing how to get publicity in the newspaper immediately ....

KING: Well, I think the climate of your own country, whatever the case is, definitely helps. But we certainly have had cases from women who are not US citizens.

FREEMAN: Wherever the UN discusses women's rights there's a group of countries and observers led by the Holy See that is resisting progress and leading the resistance to the

progress. And the one thing that these countries and observers have in common is that basically they believe that their scripture tells them that they're doing the right thing. Do you think that that argument can ever be won?

KING: Yes, I do, because I am very heartened when I see some of those countries. They are signatories and they have ratified the Convention, the Women's Bill of Rights. They do report. Some of them have told us very frankly that we have a family code that is not up to the full intention and spirit of the Convention but we are in the course of changing. When we change it as we are working on it, we will withdraw all reservations. And in some cases we have seen reservations withdrawn over the 20-year period that the Convention has been in place. And we have some countries that have joined recently in the last year or two, Djibouti for example, without a single reservation. So I think that there is cause to hope that there will be change. It's gradual but it's happening.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. King, there have been serious problems for women and children – girl children – in civil conflicts. Is the UN able to do anything to redress the terrible things that have happened to somehow draw more attention to these problems?

KING: I think the UN has done quite a bit. One is that the preventive stage where countries have been urged – and in this outcome document of this Special Session they were urged not to have girl or boy soldiers. But at the other end is to ensure that where they have been victims of conflict that they do get proper treatment, post trauma counselling and so on. It is all too little, perhaps too late, but the UN agencies – UNDP, WHO, UNFPA – are doing a tremendous amount in this area. Rwanda is a case in point, Bosnia, Herzegovina is another.

FREEMAN: Could you expand on what it is that the UN itself is doing about this? Is there more?

KING: We've put counsellors in to counsel people who have been traumatized to try and bring women back into the community because in many of these societies – for example in Rwanda – women are afraid to talk about being raped or being victims. They're thrown out by their own families, they're a shame to their own family and sometimes they never speak. I was in Arusha at the International Criminal Court there and one of the things they were working very hard on was to get the kind of interpreters who could interpret from the local languages whom the victims could trust. And of course most of these interpreters would be women, and the lawyers working with them. They were trying to

get women because they don't speak to the men quite as openly. So the UN is doing a variety of issues. I know in Rwanda the UNDP were trying to work through plays. You know, that kind of activity to bring people back to normalcy. It takes a while but ....

LITTLEJOHNS: So there are some prosecutions underway?

KING: Oh yes, both with the Rwanda Court, the Arusha Court. Sorry it's the Rwanda Court but it's in Arusha. The Akayesu case, which was over a year ago, was the first prosecution and there have been others. And The Hague Court now, the one in The Hague on the former Yugoslavia has also prosecuted. Ad this was carried forward also into the statute of the International Criminal Court which says that under certain circumstances rape in a conflict is a war crime. And I think this was due mainly to the pressure of the women's groups and lawyers that insisted that this should never happen again. There has to be an example. People can not just have the impunity for this kind of behaviour.

FREEMAN: Among the advances in the document of the recent Special Session there's mention of marital rape for the first time and honour killings. Do you think this will have an impact on the way life is lived?

KING: I think so because certain issues are taboos and I think actually marital rape was mentioned in the Beijing Document. But what is the strength of this particular statement here is that they're urging that there be strong criminal measures for it whereas it was sort of mentioned before as not being desirable. But this is much stronger so it goes beyond Beijing. In some societies, I think, honour killings and crimes of passion are seen to be sort of natural, ordinary. This is the thing to do even not only amongst the men but amongst the womenfolk in the family. And the more exposure this has and the fact that once it's in the document people are going to be asked what have you done on such and such a paragraph in this area, then it will be exposed more and more and there will be a gradual change.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. King, we have only a very few seconds left, where do you go from here to keep the momentum going?

KING: Well, I think a lot depends on the intergovernmental bodies that guide the process and the Member States and we're hoping that the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly at this session will take a very high profile view of what happened at the Special Session: Women 2000, and that at subsequent conferences that are coming up – Copenhagen + 5, the Millennium Summit and other conferences – will take

cognizance of the fact that gender is an issue that has to be taken into account if you're dealing with finance for development, if you're dealing with peacekeeping or if you're dealing with just domestic matters. And another point is that men have to work with women and women have to work with men. The women can no longer do it alone. They must work together.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. King that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.**

Our guest has been Angela King, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. She was interviewed by Evelyn Leopold from *Reuters* and Jack Freeman from *The Earth Times*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

World Chronicle is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a Public Affairs Presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.